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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION ROUNDUP,
NOVEMBER 25, 2005

REF: Almaty 3919

1. (U) This is the ninth in a series of weekly election roundups in advance of Kazakhstan's December 4, 2005 presidential elections. Items were drawn primarily from local media reporting.

Live TV debate

2. (U) On the night of November 17 live TV debates were held in Almaty and broadcast on national television. The participants included presidential candidates Zharmakhan Tuyakbay, Alikhan Baymenov, Mels Yeleusizov and Yerasyl Abylkasymov. President Nazarbayev was out of the country, but had previously declined to participate in the debates. During the debate, the candidates described their programs, posed questions to one another, and gave short addresses to the electorate.

3. (U) Tuyakbay declared that he wanted to address his questions to Nursultan Nazarbayev, but since Nazarbayev was absent he would ask Baymenov, instead, for his opinion about "Kazakhgate." (Note: "Kazakhgate" refers to the case of American citizen James Giffen, a former advisor to Nazarbayev, who allegedly violated the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act by channeling millions of dollars from U.S. and other Western oil companies to top Kazakhstan officials in order to secure lucrative contracts. The trial is expected to begin in federal court in April 2006. End Note.) Baymenov replied that the details of the case should be made public in Kazakhstan, and the stolen money returned to the country. However, Baymenov added, it was premature to accuse anybody before the court had passed its ruling. For his part, Tuyakbay commented that "there is no hope that the facts and details of the Giffen case will ever be made public as long as this political regime is in place."

4. (U) Following the debate, a spokesperson from Tuyakbay's headquarters said that the event was a positive step and a good opportunity for the candidates to talk about their programs, but that the debate format had satisfied none of the candidates -- except for Nazarbayev, who had refused to participate. "For Just Kazakhstan" (FJK) publicly called for the interested parties to arrange another debate with Nazarbayev's participation.

Nurkadilov's Death

5. (U) The investigation into former, senior GOK official and most-recently opposition critic Zamanbek Nurkadilov's death continues. On November 16 police questioned Nurkadilov's wife, the well-known folk singer Makpal Zhunusova, for 4 hours. In a subsequent press interview Zhunusova said that her husband could not have committed suicide, as there had been no reason for him to take his own life. "He loved me very much, and I respected him. We were a good family. Throughout Kazakhstan everyone knew about it. And there is no point in talking about it."

6. (U) On November 15, Dariga Nazarbayeva made the following comment on Nurkadilov's death: "This tragedy will be exploited as much as possible by political figures. This tragedy suits the radical opposition, but not the authorities."

GOK Warnings Against "Destabilization" Attempts

7. (U) On November 16 the head of the National Security Committee (KNB), Nartay Dutbayev, warned that GOK security agencies would put a stop to any attempt to foment a "colored revolution" during Kazakhstan's upcoming elections. "I do not exclude the possibility that certain 'hot-heads,' who are participating in the election for the presidency, may provoke incidents aimed at destabilizing the country," he said. "We have information to that effect."

18. (U) In response to Dutbayev's statement, Tuyakbay's headquarters addressed a rhetorical question to the KNB

chief and the CEC chairman: "Where did you get information that some individuals are trying to destabilize the situation in the country? Who are the 'hot-heads' mentioned in the statement? And how do security agencies interpret the idea of 'colored revolution?' Do you mean new, honest people coming to power after a long period of authoritarian rule; or popular, non-violent campaigns against fraud and the betrayal of the peoples' will?"

19. (U) During a November 17 briefing, Interior Minister Baurzhan Mukhamedzhanov also warned that the opposition was trying to "heat up" the situation, accusing the opposition of lending a political interpretation to non-political events. As examples, Mukhamedzhanov cited FJK's mid-October "fuss" over a Zhuma Times journalist who "disappeared" in Southern Kazakhstan (the disappearance was later discovered to be due to the journalist's memory lapse), and the opposition's outcry over Tuyakbay campaign materials that went missing (the bus carrying the materials was later found to have broken down.) Finally, Mukhamedzhanov defended law enforcement efforts to find FJK activist Elena Nikitina's missing daughter and said the opposition was trying to "politicize" the case. (Note: Per reftel, on October 13 Nikitina's 14 year-old daughter disappeared. FJK claims that, following the girl's disappearance, law enforcement officials tried to recruit Nikitina to provide information about FJK activities. It is not clear whether foul play was actually involved. End Note.)

110. (U) In conclusion, the Minister suggested that "there are some forces in the country trying to destabilize the situation." He continued: "According to our sources, certain political figures plan provocations to disrupt the normal life of our citizens. Some opposition leaders have even attempted to bribe law enforcement officials. Radical forces are getting ready to take actions in order to create disorder in the country. We will put a stop to any destabilization attempts and the organizers will be held responsible for the consequences of their illegal actions."

111. (U) On November 16, CEC Chairman Onalsyn Zhumabekov said that the CEC had learned that attempts would be made to destabilize public order on December 4. Zhumabekov did not give any names, but said that "certain people" intended to stage protests under the pretext that their names were missing from voters' lists. Zhumabekov noted that voters' lists would be posted at all voting stations from November 18 until December 3, and warned that it was the voters' responsibility to verify that their names were listed correctly.

Reported Attacks on Opposition Figures and Families

112. (U) On November 15 Tuyakbay's campaign chief in Mangistau Oblast, Zhanibek Kozhyk, was driving home when his car was stopped by four young men. When Kozhyk got out of the car the men beat him severely, and left him in an unpopulated area. Kozhyk's car and the driver, Zhetybay Sansyzbayev, disappeared. On November 17, Mukhamedzhanov announced that the police had detained two individuals suspected of the assault.

113. (U) On the night of November 16, three Almaty City police officers and a civilian beat up two of opposition leader Altynbek Sarsenbayuly's nephews. According to press reports, the violence occurred in a club, where the policemen insulted Sarsenbayuly's nephews and then beat them with billiard balls. The men were subsequently treated for serious neurosurgical injuries. The police are investigating the case, which Sarsenbayuly characterized as a "political incident."

CEC Withdrawing Observers' Accreditation

114. (U) On November 18, the CEC withdrew accreditation of the CIS-EMO, arguing that its status as an international NGO disqualified it for accreditation. CEC Chairman Zhumabekov later explained that, pursuant to the election law, representatives of foreign states, international governmental organizations, and foreign media could be

accredited for elections, but not private citizens or NGOs.

115. (SBU) The CEC used the same criterion to challenge the observer status of several ENEMO observers and an NDI representative. Embassy intervention with high-level GOK

contacts prevented the expulsion of six ENEMO personnel and the Amcit NDI employee over the weekend of November 19-20. The observers were subsequently able to regularize their immigration status. With the GOK's approval, efforts are underway to register NDI observers under the auspices of ENEMO.

CEC Moves to Lift Ban on Public Rallies

16. (U) The CEC initiated a new draft law canceling the ban on public rallies during the vote-counting process. The government approved the draft and the Ministry of Justice announced that it would be sent to Parliament in the near future; however, no timelines were set.

GOK Efforts to Balance Criticism

17. (U) The government continued its campaign to counter negative election publicity. On November 16, official media publicized the Caspian Information Center's (a London-based observation group) appraisal of recent amendments to Kazakhstan's electoral law. The CIC report disagrees with the OSCE criticism of the ban on public rallies during the vote-counting, and calls on international observers to show more responsibility regarding the potential political consequences of their recommendations.

18. (U) On November 15, the Eurasian Rating Agency and Channel 31 announced plans to conduct exit-polls in all regional centers of Almaty and Astana on December 4, ostensibly to balance potentially negative exit polls conducted by the "Fair Elections" group of human rights activists.

Zhakiyanov Update

19. (U) On November 2, the administration of the "settlement colony" where Zhakiyanov is being held recommended his release. On November 17, the Ministry of Justice announced that the MOJ "sees no barriers preventing the release of Galymzhan Zhakiyanov," and on November 18 the settlement colony's recommendation was passed to the Yekibastyz City court for action.

20. (U) Minimize for Dushanbe Considered.

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